

A Daily Publication of:



Affirmation

United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns

April 24, 2008

General Conference 2008 Fort Worth, TX

Issue #2

It's Not Easy....

by Diane DeLap

In the words of that famous American philosopher, Kermit D. Frog, "It's not easy bein' green." Every transperson I've known, and I've known hundreds, has struggled with their gender identity from early childhood. It's really hard to describe what gender confusion is all about. I suppose it's like trying to describe color to a blind person. If you haven't experienced it, it's hard to grasp the concept. For most persons, whose perception of their

gender matches their physical characteristics, the concept of being confused about their gender is completely foreign. The usual description of a "woman trapped in a man's body" doesn't really do justice to the level of confusion I experienced and what I observed in others like me.

I felt like my life was out of "sync." A better description, in my estimation, is that of the sound-picture synchronization of a movie. For me, it was like the "sound" part of my life didn't match the "picture" part of my life. When you watch a movie

that has sound out of sync with the picture, it requires intense concentration to try to match the two elements so that you can make sense out of the story. There is a real sense in which matching the gender-sex elements when they are out of sync requires a great deal of concentration. I went through life in constant tension – trying to force these elements into sync. Daily life became a constant effort to force these two parts to come together.

(It's Not Easy...Continued on page 3)

Transgender Panel Slated....

There will be a Transgender Press Conference at 5:00 PM today at the Intermodal Transportation Center (clock tower building) 1001 Jones St. (9thth and Jones.) Speaking will be:

Rev. Drew Phoenix, St. John's UMC, Baltimore MD

Sean Delmore, Program Director of the MIT LBGT Center

Diane DeLap, Spokesperson of Affirmation: United Methodists for LGBTQ Concerns

Tina Seitz, member of a United Methodist Church in Detroit, MI

With the gift of medical science, Drew Phoenix transitioned from female to male to honor his God-given gender identity. The United Methodist Church opened an investigation and the Judicial Council decided that he remains eligible to serve the church. His Baltimore congregation journeyed with him and continues to thrive.

Sean Delmore is a doctoral student of sociology at Boston University's School of Theology. He became a Christian and joined the United Methodist Church during the process of transitioning from female to male.

(Press Conference...Continued on page 3)

ITEMS OF NOTE

Pastoral Care Support
Line 612-353-7445

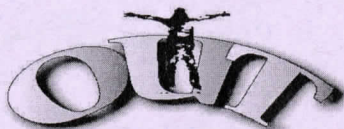
Transgender Press Conference 5:00 PM
today Intermodal Transportation Center

Soulforce Picnic In The Park with
Transgender People of Faith Fri 4/25 12:30 PM
General Worth Square, 9th and Main.

Soulforce Street Theatre Sat 4/26 5:00 PM
outside convention center.

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www.umaffirm.org, E-mail: umaffirmation_at_yahoo.com*

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Articles for the newsletter or comments may be sent to AffirmationNewsletter_at_yahoogroups.com*

Co-Editors:

Gary Shephard and Judy WestLee

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Mission Statement

As an independent voice of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people, Affirmation radically reclaims the compassionate and transforming gospel of Jesus Christ by relentlessly pursuing full inclusion in the Church as we journey with the Spirit in creating God's beloved community.

Adopted January 2005

* **Note:** substitute the symbol "@" for the letters "_at_" in the email addresses.



We're Your Active Members

Affirmation GC Newsletter Staff

Let's examine a hypothetical mid size church, say, First UMC Hypothetical.

A gay man has served on the audit committee. Two different gay men and a closeted gay or bisexual man, married with children, have sung in the choir. A lesbian does the church flower beds but knowing there's no money in the budget for landscaping doesn't submit the bills for reimbursement. Two gay men have been chair of Missions. A bisexual has been finance chair for several years. A gay man has been finance vice chair for at least four years. A gay man has been an officer in the United Methodist Men.

Persons of varying sexual orientations have been on the administrative council. Several "spinsters" have been active with the United Methodist Women.

A faithful female member told the congregation 17 years ago that her son had leukemia. She was afraid that if she told the truth about her HIV+ gay son she'd be turned out of the church. Her secret and her fear were a painful knot. Gay and lesbian members of the church and a few other supportive souls knew her secret and her fear and prayed for her. That faithful female member took the secret with her when she died.

One of the more accurate counters is a lesbian. Deposits she's worked on rarely have problems. A gay man has been

treasurer. A lesbian has been finance secretary. Who is that guest organist? Guess.

Who led that successful stewardship campaign last year? The answer would surprise you.

Lesbians, gay men and a couple of bisexuals have been active off and on with Vacation Bible School. Two of the more energetic craft projects have been put together by a gay man.

Where are the transgender people? They're still so far in the closet they don't visit or

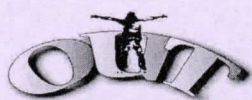
"Where are the transgender people? They're still so far in the closet they don't visit or become members of our First UMC Hypothetical."

become members of our First UMC, Hypothetical. They live within blocks of the church, but being unsure of the welcome they would get instead drive

several miles to a Metropolitan Community Church.

Look around the next Sunday you're in church. Really look. How many lesbians, gay men, bisexuals or transgender people have been willing to be open about themselves? How many are there keeping quiet about their lives away from the church? How many have sons or daughters or mothers or fathers or aunts or uncles or nieces or nephews or cousins they don't want you to know about? How much more welcome would they feel if they knew they didn't have to keep secrets from their church family?

We are active members in the UMC. We're active members in *your* UMC. We were here yesterday, we're here today, and we'll be here tomorrow.



(It's Not Easy...Continued from page 1)

Finally, my partner and I decided to discuss my transgender life with our pastor who was also a close friend. I had done some personal study and read a number of articles about the Bible's teachings related to transgender people. I had come to the conclusion that there was nothing that I could find in the Bible that indicated that being transgender was wrong. I also felt that the Bible's discussion of eunuchs indicated that transgender persons should be accepted by the church. I took my conclusions to the pastor, and as we discussed this, I asked for his prayerful study of these issues to see if I had missed anything, or if there was anything wrong with my understanding of the various relevant passages.

After several counseling sessions, I attended a regular meeting of the church board. As the first order of business, the pastor read a lengthy list of the reasons why my activities as a transgender person made me unfit to serve in any official capacity in the church. He then proposed that the board remove me from my

current responsibilities and declare me unfit to serve in the future. The board accepted his proposition. I was devastated. I felt betrayed by my pastor and my friend as well as others on the board who were my friends. I felt that, at a time of great turmoil and questioning in my life, my church had cast me aside. After several months of attempting to resolve the issues with church leaders, we stopped attending church.

Finally, I decided that it was time for me to think seriously about beginning to transition to live as a woman. We had several discussions, and found a gender counselor who also worked with couples who were going through this process. In our discussions, we realized that if we were to successfully negotiate this process, we needed to establish a relationship with a supportive church.

I located a church in a neighboring community that was a "federated" or "united" church associated with both the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist denominations. It also proudly declared that it was "Open and Affirming" as a UCC congregation and "Reconciling" as

a UMC congregation. After contacting the pastor of the church and receiving assurances that they would be accepting of our relationship, we began to attend regularly. We found them to be a warm and loving community that welcomed us as well as others of the LGBT community. We were not treated as second-class Christians because I was transsexual. We were welcomed, and as time went on, became involved in various positions in the church. What a contrast from our other church that rejected us! It was a short while after my transition that I realized that the tension that came with the feeling of being out of sync was gone. I was at peace. What a gift!!

Perhaps the most important change I have experienced is the change in my understanding of my transgender nature. It's not a burden to bear or a problem to be overcome. It's not a sin to be forgiven or a flaw to be suppressed. It's a gift from God to be lived. It's who God wants me to be. Like Kermit, I can finally say, "I am green (or, in my case, transsexual) and it'll do fine, it's beautiful! And I think it's what I want to be."

(Press Conference...Cont'd from page 1)

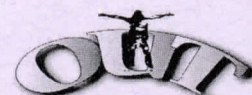
Sean is pursuing ordination as a deacon in the New England Annual Conference, and is blessed to call Cambridge Welcoming Ministries his local church home.

Diane DeLap serves as the Spokesperson for Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Concerns. Diane transitioned from male to female late in life. She married her partner, Jan, over 43 years ago and together they raised a son and

dealt with understanding Diane's life-long transgender feelings. During that time they turned to an evangelical church group in an attempt to find help through a relationship with Christ. Diane attended a Bible Seminary and became a pastor, ministering to several Midwestern independent Christian churches. Although their relationship with Christ remains firm, their relationship with that church group ended when the pastor of their church revealed Diane's transgender feelings to the church board.

Diane and Jan became members of a United Methodist affiliated church seven years ago and she has been active in numerous progressive groups in her Conference.

Tina Seitz is a transgender woman from the Detroit area. She is a parent to two teenage children and a member of The United Methodist Church. Tina is a board member of an LGBT affinity group for a large automotive company, working to educate people on the issues surrounding transsexuality.



A Brief History Of Affirmation and the Reconciling Movement

A handful of openly gay men offered 1972 General Conference delegates and visitors the opportunity for conversation about homosexuality. Few responded positively. Instead, in the waning hours of the conference, sleepy delegates amended the paragraph in the new Social Principles to read, "We do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice to be incompatible with Christian teaching." In July 1975, the United Methodist Gay Caucus organized in Evanston, IL, later renamed Gay United Methodists (GUM). It formed to insist that our lives and loving are gifts of God, not rebellion against the divine will. About a year after making a powerful presence at the 1976 General Conference, GUM became Affirmation.

Lesbian and gay church professionals began to come out across the denomination. Despite harassment and threats by fearful functionaries, these pioneers proved the church could not squelch the developing movement for justice. A specific provision against the ordination or appointment of "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" adopted by the 1984 General Conference heightened the climate of oppression. Affirmation responded by creating the Reconciling Congregation Program (RCP). The RCP is the largest organization in the LGBT religious community other than the

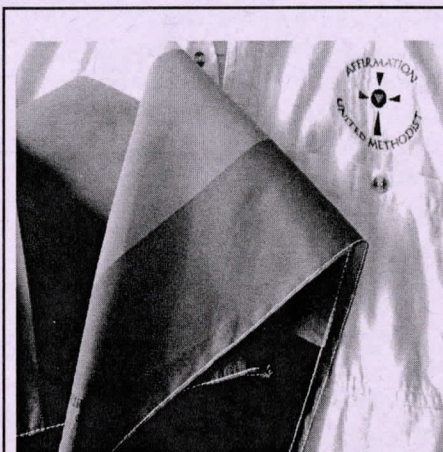
Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, with hundreds of congregations and other groups and thousands of individual reconciling United Methodists. After General Conference 2000, it became the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN).

Delegates to the 1992 General Conference rejected the majority recommendations of a study committee on homosexuality. Affirmation led a coalition of progressive groups in testifying that "the stones will cry out" until God's imperative for inclusion is met by the United Methodist Church. As at previous sessions, Affirmation offered healing liturgy, enthusiastic celebration and pointed reflection through its General Conference presence.

In a powerful witness, RCP challenged the church to "Open the Doors" to its LGBT members at the 1996 General Conference. Distorted understandings of the Gospel led instead to the prohibition of services that celebrate the covenants of same-gender couples.

Responding to widespread concern over the unjust law, Affirmation organized the Covenant Relationships Network (CORNET). The Internet-based witness provided information, inspiration, and an arena for strategy formation for those engaged with this issue.

Since 1999 hundreds of courageous clergy have pledged to obey the Gospel rather than an unjust law. The struggle over covenant services is emblematic of the denomination's continuing struggle to truly be the church.



It's a bandana! How Texan!

It's a colorful fashion statement! Although it's hard to tell from a black and white picture.

It's an OUTIE!

Coming soon!

Pastoral Care Hotline

Affirmation is sponsoring an LGBTQ and friends pastoral care hotline that will be staffed from April 24th through the end of General Conference. A clergy person will available at 612-353-7445.

Those who want to talk will be paired up on the phone with clergy counselors to discuss the challenges of being at General Conference. It will also be possible to meet up with clergy at lunch

each day at First Christian Church. The Chaplains will be wearing baseball caps identifying themselves. You may call and make an appointment or just come up and say hi at lunch.

**Hotline Number:
612-353-7445**

General Conference is a time of excitement, energy and hope for our church. It also is a time of frustration and concern. These emotions can be very draining. Know that chaplains are here to support you for the duration of the conference.